

Guiding Documents

1 5

Guiding Principles

Strategic Plan



Guiding Principles

A strong tendency to avoid opposing views while displaying righteousness about individual perspectives characterizes a growing part of today's culture.

Atlanta History Center, as a cultural institution, is dedicated to creating a space for visitors to engage with ideas and people who think differently from themselves and to provide an opportunity to confront their own blind spots.

Today, it often feels like we, as a society, are more polarized than ever before.

While there have always been strongly held opposing viewpoints and vocal disagreements, more people today have access to public platforms to express these opinions. This new reality means we have access to so much overwhelming information that it can be easier to retreat into the comforting echo chamber of those who agree with us while achieving immediate gratification by lashing out at those who do not.

Atlanta History Center believes that history is an effective medium for bridging these chasms; artfully told and grounded in evidence, it can bring us together. History is also messy. Whether realized or not, it continuously influences our world by shaping our viewpoints and experiences. These qualities make history a touchstone for stimulating hard conversations, and make cultural institutions, places that still retain a high degree of public trust, an ideal place for doing it. We are living in a time of anger and flux; rather than shy away, Atlanta History Center wants to seize the opportunity for change.

Today, when visitors enter interpretive digital and physical spaces at the Atlanta History Center, we encourage them to bring with them their own experiences, identities, and thoughts about the past. We invite them to join us in engaging with hard topics and perhaps walking away with a more empathetic and broader understanding of our collective past.

Atlanta History Center believes in clear, thoughtful communication that will stimulate curiosity while being straightforward on the facts. We will not be neutral regarding well-documented historical conclusions that might be considered controversial in the public sphere. Through our presentation of difficult history, we do not seek to shame, label, or discourage visitors; rather, we seek to engage with them through exhibitions, programming, and outreach that encourage discussions that are empathetic, historically-informed, and inclusive of all members of the community.



Strategic Plan

As we approach the 100th anniversary of our founding in 2026, we are taking the opportunity to reflect on our institutional evolution and past strategic goals to plan for our next 100 years.

Nearly a century of existence offers us the opportunity to gain new perspective on our own institutional history, and the ways in which we have grown, the gaps in our collections and content that remain, and how we want to use these lessons to create an even stronger and more resilient institution for the future.

The year 2020 brought an assessment of our current Strategic Plan. With 2020 set as the benchmark year to evaluate that plan well before it was known what a monumental year that would be, the timing could not be more appropriate. Though Atlanta History Center met many of its strategic goals from the 2016 Plan, some goals revealed a need for a plan that focused more on concrete actions than abstract goals. This new Strategic Plan seeks to establish these concrete actions, while placing high importance on methods of achieving our mission.

When Atlanta History Center marks 100 years of existence, the United States will mark its 250th anniversary.

We will focus on the role that Atlanta History Center can play in a functional democratic system and hold democracy at the center of our research, scholarship, and storytelling. As people across our city, state, and country consider what it means to create a democracy functioning by and for everyone, Atlanta History Center will use its resources to explore the history of the components that make a healthy democratic system, including methods of civic engagement, widespread and informed voter participation, civil rights, and community leadership.



We will continue to grow and excel in stewardship, education, and interpretation, and build community-centered initiatives for collecting, interpretation, and preservation.

We will deliver on our mission through every available method, including onsite offerings; in-person programs on and off our campus; and digital tools.

Finally, we want to inspire our audiences and partners to think deeply about our community, where we came from, and where we're going—and understand history in new or different ways that can help cultivate understanding, broadened perspectives, and engagement in our ongoing democratic experiment.

Being an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organization that is part of the Atlanta community makes us well-positioned to do this work. With the diverse people, cultures, experiences, history, and resources that comprise Atlanta, our community helps us represent broader historical perspectives and interact and communicate with a broad public. History is also ongoing and ever-changing as new research, stories, and collections are shared. Our historical interpretation, programs, educational resources, and exhibitions will seek to reflect that reality and our home city, while also using Atlanta's history as a lens to understand our country's past.

Our Purpose

Use history to bring people together to explore new and different perspectives with the goal of strengthening our shared commitment to, and engagement in, our democratic system.

Our Mission

Connect people, culture,
and history to cultivate
understanding of
our shared history.

We believe that by increasing the perspective each of us has on our shared history, more people will better understand what has worked, what has not, and how our history continues to influence the present. We will strive to present a more complete understanding of our history that will enable people to be more informed and inspired to engage in the democratic process.

Our Methods



Communicating with our audiences in thoughtful, evidence-based, and creative ways in accordance with our Guiding Principles



Sharing intriguing, surprising stories from multiple perspectives while amplifying untold and untold history to encourage understanding and recognition of different experiences



Using digital platforms to share stories that emphasize areas supported by our expertise, including the cause of and various narratives created to explain the Civil War and Reconstruction, Atlanta history and how the city has changed over time



Using a variety of mediums, including digital products, virtual programs, new and updated exhibitions, and in-person experiences to share stories credibly and compellingly



Working with communities to preserve, document, and share stories of Atlanta that inform exhibition and program development



Creating experiences (e.g., Community Free Days and Party with the Past programs) and content that is relevant and engaging to all our stakeholders and audiences, including people of color, people under the age of 50, and people throughout metro Atlanta.



Recruiting, retaining, and developing Board members, staff, and volunteers reflective of the demographics of Metro Atlanta residents

In-Person

Our two campuses serve as the repositories for our collections, exhibition galleries, historic houses and buildings, Kenan Research Center, and Goizueta Gardens. These facilities provide space to host educational, public, and family programming. Community-oriented experiences also occur at other sites throughout Atlanta.

Our Goals

Enhance our ability to offer multiple perspectives to visitors through programs, tours, personalized experiences, educational programs, and exhibitions that include simulations, performances, digital assets, and other immersive techniques and settings

Refresh and enhance existing permanent exhibitions and other experiences to encompass new research, stories, and methods

Encourage curiosity and connection through customized and small group engagement

Continue creating a welcoming experience through a focus on hospitality underscored by our Rules of Civility

Digital

Our digital experience will offer creative, meaningful, and substantive engagement well beyond our physical facilities. In an emerging world of virtual museum audiences and researchers, our brand must become synonymous with excellence in historical research, collecting, and interpretation.

Our Goals

Present best-in-class and evidence-based content that is relevant and timely, including virtual exhibitions, educational content for all ages, podcasts, and video. Our initial areas of focus will be the cause and ongoing impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the stories of our city and its neighborhoods

Focus content creation on storytelling as a lens to connect history with the present where the historical records and through lines are clear, while transparently communicating our historical resources and research methods

Integrate digital experiences into exhibitions, collecting initiatives, and partnerships with community organizations

OUR STRENGTHS

Our dedicated staff, board of trustees, and volunteers.

Making historical sources that support our interpretation in exhibitions, programs, and print, digital, and experiential content publicly available, reaffirming our commitment to evidence-based interpretation and intellectual rigor.

Clarity of purpose provided in the Strategic Plan and clarity of approach as defined in Guiding Principles.

Our proven track record of being able to fundraise to support significant strategic initiatives.



Manuscript Storage | Kenan Research Center

Metrics

We will measure our success by tracking both in-person and substantive virtual interactions to ensure that we are growing our reach and evaluating what content and programs are most engaging and provide meaningful perspective to our stakeholders and audiences.

Over the next year, we will identify appropriate measurements that indicate meaningful digital engagement, treating FY22 as a fact-finding and baseline year to grow from for the duration of the Strategic Plan.

